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Cutaneous Fibrous Dysplasia: An Incomplete Form of the McCune-Albright Syndrome

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Abstract

A number of genetic disorders have been described in limited form. We report a patient with precocious puberty, large irregularly shaped café-au-lait spots since birth and a diffuse scalp alopecia showing the cutaneous changes of fibrous dysplasia. Histologically, the hair follicles were replaced by convolutions of fibrous tissue. This is to our knowledge the first patient reported with an apparently localized cutaneous form of this syndrome, a pattern predicted by the recently described somatic mutation of the $G_s \alpha$ gene. This is the second patient reported to our knowledge with the cutaneous McCune-Albright syndrome and scalp alopecia, and the first with diffuse scalp alopecia, the latter being the presenting sign. We believe that the differential diagnosis of both localized and diffuse alopecia should include the McCune-Albright syndrome.

In 1937, Albright et al. [1] described 5 women with a syndrome characterized by osteitis fibrosa disseminata, areas of pigmentation and endocrine dysfunction with precocious puberty. McCune [2] and McCune and Bruch [3] had described this disorder in a 9-

year-old girl 1 year earlier. The McCune-Albright syndrome is now known to be a sporadic disorder whose manifestations may be explained by a somatic mutation of the $G_s \alpha$ gene [4, 5]. Scalp alopecia in this syndrome was described by Shelley and Wood [6]. This

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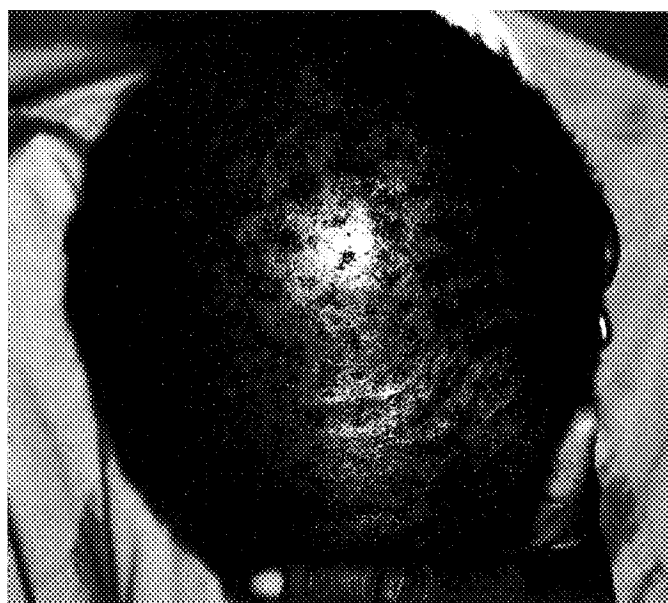


Fig. 1. Diffuse patchy alopecia of the scalp.



Fig. 2. Large café-au-lait patch on the left forearm.

is to our knowledge the first patient reported with the McCune-Albright syndrome presenting with diffuse alopecia of the scalp.

Case Report

A 52-year-old woman with primary biliary cirrhosis was evaluated for scalp alopecia. This patient described a history of onset of pruritus and progressive hair loss of the scalp and body of 4 years duration, with an associated generalized increase in pigmentation for the past 3 years. The alopecia began in the axilla and progressed to include the hair of her face, trunk and extremities. The loss on her scalp advanced rapidly, leaving sparse, thin hair. The hyperpigmentation was first noted on the dorsum of her feet but then generalized without association with solar exposure. Two large patches of hyperpigmentation on the left side of the abdomen and the left arm were related by the patient as birthmarks, having been present all of her life.

This woman subsequently developed pruritus and jaundice with associated dark urine and light, clay-colored stool. With the patient's main complaint of intractable pruritus, trials of plasmapheresis and antihistamines were carried out with little success. It was at this time that the patient was seen at our institution. The patient had had onset of

menarche at the age of 9 years; she denied any history of bone fractures. Her medical history included diabetes mellitus which was treated with 40 units of NPH insulin each morning, left mastectomy for breast cancer in 1980 and cholelithiasis diagnosed by ultrasound in 1980. The family history was only significant for diabetes mellitus in her father. She had no known allergies to medications and denied cigarette smoking and alcohol use.

On physical examination, the patient was noted to have a well-developed body devoid of hair, but with scant patches on the scalp (fig. 1). On the left forearm, an 8 × 12 cm hyperpigmented patch with an irregular, jagged border was detected (fig. 2). A similar 10 × 15 cm hyperpigmented patch on the left side of her abdomen was also noted. Within these large hyperpigmented patches there were smaller, more deeply pigmented macules. No freckles or other pigmentation were present in the axillae, nor were any neurofibromas or xanthomas present. The sclerae were mildly icteric, the fundi showed sharp disk margins and no vascular changes, and the oral mucosa had two small pigmented areas. No palpable lymphadenopathy was noted, and the heart and lungs were normal. In addition, the abdominal examination showed a firm slightly enlarged, but nontender liver, with smooth margins measuring 16 cm in the midclavicular line. The spleen was not palpable. Mus-

culoskeletal and neurological evaluation showed no abnormalities. The physical examination was otherwise unremarkable.

Initial laboratory findings included alkaline phosphatase, 1,210 U/l, alanine aminotransferase, 94 U/l, aspartate aminotransferase, 75 U/l, lactate dehydrogenase, 70 U/l, total bilirubin, 2.4 mg/dl, direct bilirubin, 1.3 mg/dl, albumin, 3.2 g/dl, prothrombin time, 12.0 s, cholesterol, 412 mg/dl and random glucose, 215 mg/dl. Her complete blood count revealed a hemoglobin level, 10.6 g/dl, hematocrit, 32.3%, white blood cell count, $3.4 \times 1,000/\mu\text{l}$, with a normal differential, platelet count, $174 \times 1,000/\mu\text{l}$ and a mean corpuscular volume, $72.2 \mu\text{m}^3$. The electrolytes, blood urea nitrogen, creatinine, hepatitis A and B screens, serologic test for syphilis, thyroid studies, as well as iron, ferritin, total iron binding capacity, vitamin B₁₂ and folic acid measurements were normal. Stool tested for occult blood was negative. A liver biopsy revealed expansion of the portal area with mononuclear cells, bile duct proliferation, lymphoid follicles and granulomas in the presence of fibrosis and lobular distortion compatible with the diagnosis of primary biliary cirrhosis. A repeat liver biopsy also demonstrated changes consistent with primary biliary cirrhosis of at least stage III. Antimitochondrial antibody and antinuclear antibody titers were within normal limits. Skeletal ra-

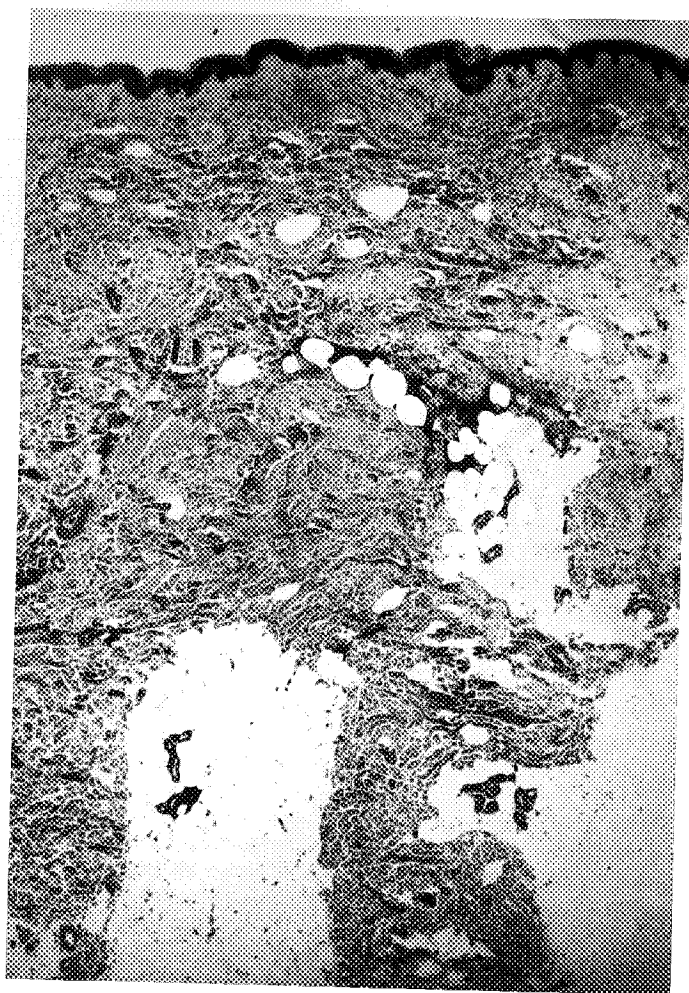


Fig. 3. Scalp skin showing complete replacement of dermal and deep follicular adnexal structures by fibrous tissue. Adipose tissue is found within the middermis. Note the remnant of pilar erector muscle in the upper middermis (center of photomicrograph). HE. $\times 10$.



Fig. 4. Higher-power photomicrograph of a separate section showing a fibrinoid remnant of a hair follicle. HE. $\times 60$.

diographs of the skull, chest and lower extremities revealed a normal bone cortex, and a bone scan showed no indication of fibrous dysplasia. Barium enema, esophagogastroduodenoscopy and colonoscopy were unable to detect any lesions or source of bleeding. Skin biopsy specimens of the scalp and the hyperpigmented lesion on the left arm were taken. There was no evidence in this patient of xanthelasma, sicca complex, Raynaud's phenomenon, CREST syndrome or Hashimoto's thyroiditis.

Therapy to address the intractable pruritus, including *d*-penicillamine, cholestyramine and phenobarbital, have been unsuccessful. A liver transplant had been suggested, but the patient declined this treatment.

Histopathology

The microscopic findings of sections of the specimen from the hyperpigmented patch on the left arm, at multiple levels, demonstrated and increased prominence of melanocytes and melanin. This impression was consistent with the café-au-lait macule of Albright syndrome. Sections of the scalp revealed complete replacement of dermal and deep follicular adnexal structures by fibrous tissue. Adipose tissue was located within the middermis (fig.3). The findings of fibrous dysplasia were noted in the hair follicles in several sections (fig.4). Calcium was not evident in the dermis.

Discussion

The McCune-Albright syndrome appears to be the result of an early mutational event producing a mosaic population of cells, with the occurrence and degree of involvement in the skin, bone and endocrine tissues depending upon the number and location of cells bearing this mutation. To be more specific, original work found an early somatic mutation of the G_s α gene of endocrine organs with increased expression of the G_s protein [7, 8]. Recent studies have shown an activating G_s α mutation resulting in substitution of Arg with Cys or His at amino acid 201 of the G_s α protein. GTPase activity is inhibited causing an inappropriate stimulation of adenylyl cy-

clase. This has now been found in endocrine as well as nonendocrine tissue, specifically bone, of patients with McCune-Albright syndrome [4, 5]. Our patient's limited involvement seems to support this hypothesis.

The clinical manifestations of the somatic mutation of the G_s α gene are varied. The McCune-Albright syndrome is characterized by osteitis fibrosa disseminata, café-au-lait patches and sexual precocity. Other hyperfunctional endocrinopathies of the gonads, thyroid, adrenal cortex and pituitary somatotropes have been described [9]. Other nonendocrine manifestations of the McCune-Albright syndrome include hepatobiliary disease, cardiac disease and premature death [9]. The degree of involvement of each organ system ranges from severe, with neonatal death, to subtle. The latter may go undiagnosed.

The clinical features of café-au-lait macules found in Albright syndrome typically cover large areas of skin, are few in number and have the tendency to remain unilateral. The patches have a characteristic irregular border with serrated edges, resembling the 'coast of Maine' [6]. The café-au-lait macules of neurofibromatosis are found in greater number, usually 6 or more, and are smaller

in size but exceeding 1.5 cm in diameter [10]. Moreover, the margins here tend to be smooth, with a likening to the coast of California. It has generally been recognized that these differences alone are not enough to distinguish these two diagnoses [11, 12].

Alopecia as a sign of the McCune-Albright syndrome was first described by Shelley and Wood [6]. They reported a 48-year-old woman with a circular patch of total alopecia of the right crown measuring 8 cm in diameter, which had been observed as a small patch enlarging since childhood. The histologic pattern was that not only of cutaneous fibrous dysplasia replacing hair follicles but also of ossification so remarkable that it was evident in soft tissue roentgenograms. Pierini et al. [13] also reported alopecia in a patient with McCune-Albright syndrome. The histology was consistent with nevus lipomatosus. The histology of the scalp specimen from our patient shows adipose tissue within the middermis. The significance of this is unclear; however, this may be another cutaneous manifestation of the somatic mutation of the G_s α gene. Our patient was unique in that the alopecia was so widespread as to involve the entire scalp. In addition, she lacked a history of either bone fractures or radio-

graphic bone abnormalities. The lack of apparent fibrous dysplasia in bone is consistent with the somatic mutation hypothesis [4, 5, 7, 8] and represents to our knowledge the first patient with predominate cutaneous involvement. This is also the first time to our knowledge that primary biliary cirrhosis has been associated with this syndrome.

One should be aware that there are two clinically distinctive Albright syndromes, the McCune-Albright syndrome and Albright's hereditary osteodystrophy due to pseudohyperparathyroidism or to pseudopseudohyperparathyroidism [8, 14]. Cutaneous bone formation has been described in both syndromes [6, 14]. Both may be associated with defects in the G_s α gene [5, 15, 16].

We report a case of diffuse, patchy alopecia as the presenting sign in a patient with McCune-Albright syndrome. The patient did not seek medical attention for her precocious puberty nor for her asymptomatic hyperpigmented café-au-lait patches. The lack of apparent fibrous dysplasia in bone is consistent with the somatic mutation hypothesis [4, 5, 7, 8]. We agree with Shelley and Wood [6] that the differential diagnosis of alopecia should include the McCune-Albright syndrome.

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